



Digital Wellness

Building a Healthy Relationship
with Technology

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Digital Wellness: Building a Healthy Relationship with Technology

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Introduction

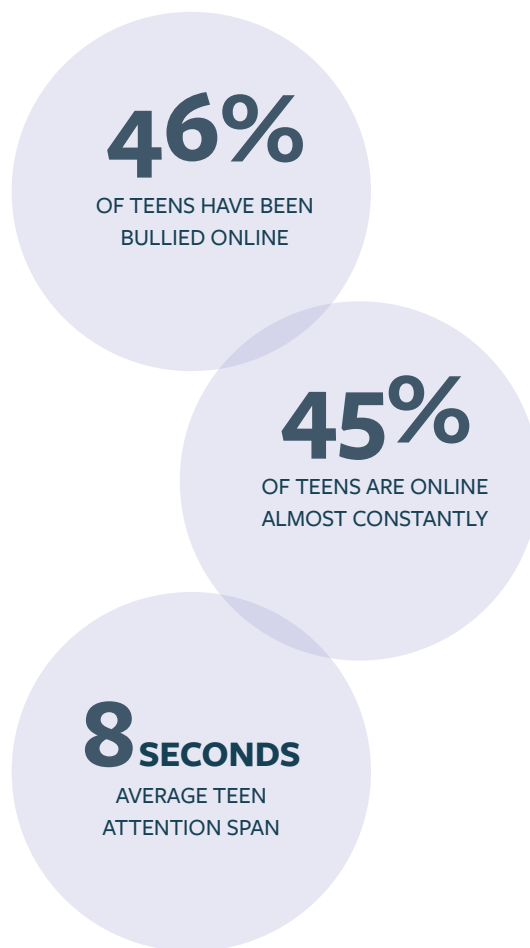
Digital Wellness is a resource guide intended to help educators create more meaningful conversations with students about social media, technology, and their impact on health and wellbeing. As technology advances, our relationships with it become increasingly complex and warrant more careful consideration. Research on tech use and its impacts on health and wellbeing is continually growing and changing, and many of the statistics are concerning:

- According to the [Pew Research Center](#), 46% of teens ages 13-17 have been bullied or harassed online, with physical appearance being a common reason why. Over $\frac{2}{3}$ of the teens who reported experiencing mental health problems also reported being bullied online in the past year. (1)
- [Commonsense Media](#) reports that teens spend an average of nine hours a day using technology, excluding work for school, and 45% of teens report being online almost constantly. (2)
- Since the rise of the media age, many children and adults are experiencing much shorter attention spans, with some sources indicating as short as 8 to 12 seconds! (3)
- As the [Center for Humane Technology](#) points out, “Our data is exploited by an industry that extracts our attention, shapes our thoughts and behaviors, and makes us vulnerable to risks.” (4)

And the anecdotal evidence is just as compelling. As educators we see the effects of social media and technology on mental health and behavior in our daily interactions with students.

To help people look more closely at their technology habits and evaluate whether they are using technology in a purposeful, healthy manner, we adopted four critical filters: **Constructive**, **Mindful**, **Kind**, and **Healthy**. Looking through the lens of each filter, we ask, *Is your technology use serving you well?*

To help answer that question, we created 15 user-friendly, accessible activities directly linked to the four filters, designed for advisory and classroom settings. We knew that a heavy-handed or judgemental approach would get us nowhere with our students. Rather, we have found that providing information and engaging teens in exploratory discussions and activities can help them look more closely and critically at their technology habits. It is our hope that, with resources and practices like those offered here, we can encourage people to better negotiate and regulate their relationships with their devices, leading to more constructive, mindful, kind, and healthy use of technology, among teens and adults alike.



(1) Vogels, E. (2022, December 15). *Teens and Cyberbullying 2022*. Pew Research Center.

(2) Common Sense Media. (2015, November 3). *Landmark Report: U.S. Teens Use an Average of Nine Hours of Media Per Day, Tweens Use Six Hours*. Common Sense Media.

(3) In 2015, Microsoft's own research claimed the human attention span was down to 8 seconds.

(4) Center for Humane Technology. (n.d.). *Key Issues Overview*. Center for Humane Technology.

The 4 Filters

Use these **4 filters** to evaluate whether you are using technology in a purposeful, healthy manner.

Constructive

Is this a good use of my time?

Am I watching, listening, or doing so many things at once that I'm not doing any one thing well?

Mindful

Am I fully present and enjoying the moment or am I focused on capturing it for others (or mindlessly scrolling or browsing)?

Kind

Am I being supportive and compassionate?

How will my words and actions make others feel?

Healthy

Is what I'm doing healthy and safe for me mentally, emotionally, and physically?

CONSTRUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY USE

Constructive means serving a useful purpose; helping to develop or improve something; getting things done in an efficient, practical, and timely way.

A **constructive** relationship with technology will serve you well and help you meet your goals, however small or large they may be. When you use technology, you may find yourself fighting against certain habits that are unconstructive or even destructive, such as:

Distraction

Setting out to research something specific online, and then falling down a rabbit hole of information or unrelated online activities (social media, etc.).

Procrastination

Spending minutes or even hours using technology for fun and enjoyment (social media, movies, music, etc.), and then not getting other things done.

To cultivate more constructive technology use, it may help to acknowledge that:

- **Multitasking is not a constructive habit.** In reality, when you switch back and forth between multiple tasks, it becomes more difficult to complete any one of them. Research consistently shows that, when you are interrupted (or purposefully interrupt yourself), it takes an average of 23 ½ minutes to get back to your original state of focus. ([University of California, Irvine](#), 2015)
- **Technology is a powertool, not a swiss army knife.** It can't do everything we want it to do and, despite our tendency to rely on it, it often isn't the right tool for the job. For example, you may turn to the internet to look up something specific—a recipe, directions, a particular date or fact— and end up with much more information than is useful or desirable for your purposes.
- **Your attention is a valuable resource.** Limiting distractions and setting a goal before you go online can help to prevent you from getting sucked into the limitless whirlwind of the internet. It is up to you to choose the terms for your technology use, and your technology use will be most constructive when you create the right environment to accomplish your tasks.

ACTIVITIES

Sharing Circle

The Multitasking Myth

Boredom is Good
for the Brain

Using technology constructively really means being aware of your habits and keeping yourself on track while online. The following activities will encourage further conversations and engage students in thinking about how to be constructive in their use of technology.

ACTIVITY ONE: SHARING CIRCLE

For this activity, you will engage in a group discussion about your tech use. The questions are designed to help participants think about how to avoid getting side-tracked or distracted by their devices and how to make technology work for them constructively.

STEP ONE

Opening quote

“It is not how busy you are, but why you are busy—the bee is praised, the mosquito is swatted.”

– Anonymous

STEP TWO

Mindful moment

“Two feet, one breath.”

Close your eyes or take a soft gaze toward the ground in front of you. Bring your attention to the feeling of your two feet and the ground firmly underneath it. Sit up straight and take in one slow, deep breath, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through your mouth.

STEP THREE

Guidelines for conversation

- Respect the talking piece.
- Listen to understand rather than to respond.
- Speak from the heart.
- What is said in the circle stays in the circle.
- Passing is always an option, but we strongly encourage you to share as much as you are comfortable.

STEP FOUR

Questions/Rounds

1. **What is one of your favorite apps, websites, or streaming platforms? Why? What do you use it to do (social media, gaming, watching shows)?**
 2. **Think about a recent time when you had a task or assignment to do on your device. What distracted you? Were you able to finish the task?**
 3. **What are some ways you can or do use technology (such as calendars, notes, alarms, or reminders) to help you stay organized and productive?**
 4. **What is one goal you could set or step you could take to use technology in a more constructive way? What new habit might help you to get the things done that you set out to do with technology?**
-

STEP FIVE

Closing quote

“It takes a bee 10,000,000 trips to collect enough nectar to make 1 pound of honey.”

– Sue Monk Kidd

ACTIVITY TWO: THE MULTITASKING MYTH

This activity is designed to demonstrate what happens when you try to multitask or switch-task, meaning switching between one task and another. You probably do this all the time on your devices—switching between tabs, windows, or various apps, and moving your attention swiftly from one thing to another—but you do it at a cost.

For this exercise, you will time participants while they switch between two writing tasks. [Please refer to this instructional video](#) before you begin.

STEP ONE

Give each participant a writing utensil and a piece of paper with 4 lines on it.

STEP TWO

Explain that you will time them while they write the phrase “Multitasking is a myth” on the first line, and the numbers 1-19 on the second line.

STEP THREE

Go! Begin your timer, calling out 5-second intervals: 5 seconds, 10 seconds, 15, 20, 25, 30. Then, stop. Most participants probably got the phrase and numbers written. Ask them to make a note on their pages of how long it took them to complete the task.

STEP FOUR

Now ask participants to write the same phrase and set of numbers again, but this time, switch back and forth between lines. They should write one letter, then one number, then the second letter, the second number, and so on. Again, call out the 5-second intervals as they write, this time allowing at least to 45 seconds. Again, have participants note how long it took them to complete the task.

STEP FIVE

What happened? What did you notice about how much time it took, how many mistakes you made, and how you felt? Have your group share their thoughts about the exercise.

ACTIVITY THREE: **BOREDOM IS GOOD FOR THE BRAIN**

Use [this EdSurge article](#) to help your group think more deeply about the potential value of boredom for our bodies and our brains. A [Four A's protocol](#) will be a useful guide for your reading and conversation.

STEP ONE

The group reads the text silently, highlighting it and writing notes in the margin or on post-it notes. As they read, they should think about how to answer the following four questions (you can also add your own "A"s):

- **What Assumptions does the author make in the text?**
- **What do you Agree with in the text?**
- **What do you want to Argue with in the text?**
- **What parts of the text do you want to Act on or Aspire to?**

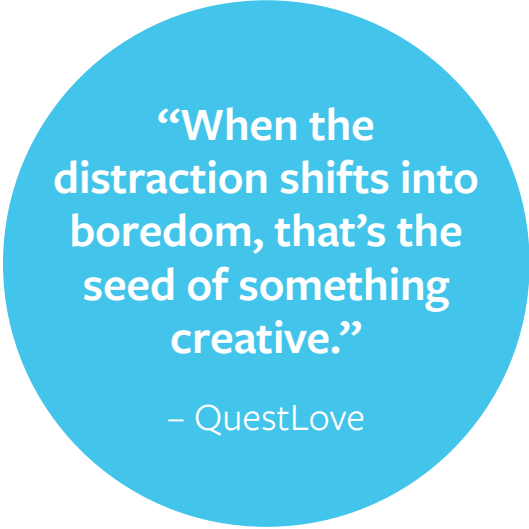
STEP TWO

In a round, have each person identify one idea in the text they **agree** with. Either continue in rounds or facilitate a conversation in which the group talks about the text in relation to each of the remaining "A"s, taking them one at a time. What do people want to **argue** with, **aspire to** or **act on**? What **assumptions** the author makes in the text? Try to move seamlessly from one "A" to the next, giving each "A" enough time for full exploration. Make sure everyone in the group has a chance to speak to each "A", or they can pass.

STEP THREE

End the session with an open discussion framed around a question such as:

What does this mean for us?



“When the distraction shifts into boredom, that’s the seed of something creative.”

– QuestLove

MINDFUL TECHNOLOGY USE

Mindfulness is the practice of purposely focusing your attention on what's happening here and now, without knee-jerk reactions or judgments.

Mindfulness is simply a way of paying attention. Research studies have shown that regular mindfulness practice helps reduce stress, strengthen your brain's executive functions, and quiet your nervous system's "fight-or-flight" response (which we might also experience as "argue-or-avoid"). Mindfulness practice can help you to focus your attention, control your impulses, and regulate your emotions. ([Mindful Schools](#), 2015)

If you use technology regularly, you have probably experienced the following:

- 👎 Losing track of time while gaming, scrolling, or surfing and getting lost down internet rabbit holes.
- 👎 Using technology to fill time because you are bored, avoiding an uncomfortable feeling, or simply engaging in a habit of checking your phone during a lull in the action.
- 👎 Not being present in the moment because you are busy capturing it with a device or planning how you will portray the moment later on social media.

To encourage more mindful technology use you might consider:

- 👍 Taking technology breaks, and establishing tech-free spaces, especially in the hours before sleep or when you need to concentrate deeply.

- 👍 Bringing back boredom! Imagination, creativity, and innovation thrive in moments where your brain is free from stimulation..
- 👍 Thinking about who benefits from tracking your attention and exploiting it to make money. Are you a willing participant?
- 👍 Examining how your viewpoints might be influenced by the information you get in your feed or from search engines. How often do you encounter new, unfamiliar, or conflicting opinions and arguments?
- 👍 Asking yourself whether you are using technology to suppress uncomfortable feelings or avoid awkward moments.
- 👍 Reflecting on whether you are allowing yourself to be present in the moment. Are you looking at the sunset, or are you just using it as a background for a picture or post?

Mindful technology use means paying attention to your thoughts, feelings, and mental habits while you're online and noticing how technology affects you. The following activities are designed to give participants a stronger sense of how technology is engineered to hook in the viewer and how mindfulness can give you greater control over the valuable resource of your attention.

ACTIVITIES

Sharing Circle

Teens, We've Been Sneaking Into Your Brains

Bored and Brilliant Challenge: One Small Observation

ACTIVITY ONE: SHARING CIRCLE

For this activity, you will engage in a group discussion about your tech use with mindfulness in mind. The questions are designed to help participants bring greater self-awareness to their unconscious habits around technology use.

STEP ONE

Opening quote

“The best way to capture moments is to pay attention. This is how we cultivate mindfulness.”

– Jon Kabat-Zinn

STEP TWO

Mindful moment

“Two feet, one breath.”

Close your eyes or take a soft gaze toward the ground in front of you. Bring your attention to the feeling of your two feet and the ground firmly underneath it. Sit up straight and take in one slow, deep breath, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through your mouth.

STEP THREE

Guidelines for conversation

- Respect the talking piece.
- Listen to understand rather than to respond.
- Speak from the heart.
- What is said in the circle stays in the circle.
- Passing is always an option, but we strongly encourage you to share as much as you are comfortable.

Additional questions if you have extra time:

Are there activities that you used to do or want to do that you no longer have time for because of time spent using technology?

Checking in with yourself after media use, how do you usually feel mentally and physically?

Do you complete your tech-related work before you use tech for pleasure?

STEP FOUR

Questions/Rounds

1. **On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “I am never sure where my phone is” and a 5 being “I check it at least once every few minutes”, how connected are you to your phone?**
 2. Think about physical, social, and academic activities in which you engage regularly, such as hanging out with friends, hobbies, exercise, doing school work, and practicing something you want to get good at like an instrument, a sport, or another discipline. How would you describe the balance in your life between:
 - a. **the things you enjoy doing that don’t involve a device,**
 - b. **the things you have to get done, on a device or off,**
 - c. **and the time you spend on a device doing non-essential activities?**
 3. Have you ever caught yourself not really feeling, seeing, or doing something in the present moment because you were busy capturing it by taking photos/video or planning for how you would portray that moment later on social media? Describe such a time, when you weren’t very present in a real life moment. In other words, **What do you think about it now?**
 4. **Who might track and profit from the time you spend on a site and what you pay attention to? How might that tracking influence what appears in your feed and the content you see on sites like Tik Tok, Instagram, Reddit, or YouTube?**
-

STEP FIVE

Closing quote

“Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different; enjoying the pleasant without holding on when it changes (which it will); being with the unpleasant without fearing it will always be this way (which it won’t).”

– James Baraz

ACTIVITY TWO: **TEENS, WE’VE BEEN SNEAKING INTO YOUR BRAINS**

Share Max Stossel’s video [Teens, We’ve Been Sneaking Into Your Brains](#) with your group. Geared toward an adolescent audience, this video speaks directly to high school students about how persuasive technology is designed. A former UX (user experience) social media designer, Max Stossel is Youth & Education Advisor for the Center for Humane Technology and founder and CEO of Social Awakening, a group that promotes healthy use of social media. With this video, he explains the concept of attention currency and how sites are designed to capture and exploit people’s attention—especially young people’s attention—for profit.

Discussion questions

- 1. What is an aspect of one of your favorite apps that keeps you hooked in (ie. scrolling)?**
- 2. How do you feel about streaks?**
- 3. What did you think about Max differentiating between how much you like a game/app vs. how it makes you feel?**
- 4. Which apps/games make you feel good after using them and which make you feel bad?**
- 5. Can you relate to using tech as a distraction when things get hard or uncomfortable? Can you give an example?**

Activity follow up:

Tools and Reminders For Students

– Max Stossel, Center for Humane Technology Use

ACTIVITY THREE: ONE SMALL OBSERVATION

This activity is one of several [Bored and Brilliant Challenges](#) offered by WNYC's Podcast, *Note to Self*.

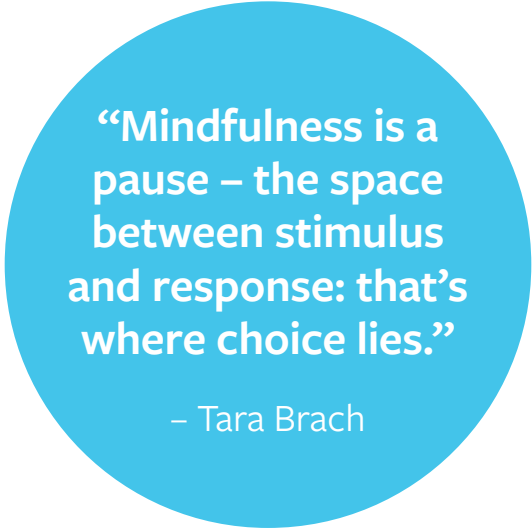
To prime the creative pump for this activity, play a couple of [examples from the podcast](#) for your group. We especially recommend “Dog at the Denver Airport,” “Ye Old Plumber’s Butt,” and “Pocket Pepper Grinder.”

STEP ONE

Participants go to a public space, such as a park, mall, gas station, or a hallway at school or work. Once you get there, spend some time watching people or animals or looking at objects in the environment. Imagine what a stranger is thinking about or focus your attention on a detail. Make one small observation you might have missed if you were focused on a device.

STEP TWO

Record your observations using a voice memo app on your phone or by writing a short paragraph. When the group has reconvened, share your recollections.



“Mindfulness is a pause – the space between stimulus and response: that’s where choice lies.”

– Tara Brach

KIND TECHNOLOGY USE

In order to use technology with kindness, you must hold yourself to the same standards of behavior online as you try to uphold in person.

Kind tech use means being nurturing, supportive, and compassionate with others when online and always considering how your words and actions affect others when you use technology. Since everything that you say and do online happens at lightning speed and never goes away, a technology honor code can help you to engage with kindness toward others online, in real life, and with yourself. That honor code can be summed up in three key words: *Do No Harm*.

To ensure that you are being kind to others when using technology, here are some questions to ask yourself about your tech behavior:

- **How might my words and images be perceived by others online?**
- **Do I say things online that I wouldn't say in person?**
- **Do I post pictures and videos without the permission of the people in them?**
- **Am I adhering to the expectations that have been established around tech use in the space that I am in? Am I doing the task at hand?**
- **Should my attention be focused on someone or something else? For example, should I focus on the people I am with instead of focusing on my device?**
- **Does my screen time or device use factor into arguments with parents, teachers, or friends?**

There are also things you can do to be kind to yourself when using technology, such as:

- Unfriend someone whose presence on your social media account or page makes you uncomfortable.
- Untag yourself from a photo that embarrasses you or ask that the photo be removed.
- Delete harmful comments on your social media accounts.
- Use privacy settings to restrict access to your page.

“Where we want to be cautious... is when the sound of a voice or a cup of coffee with a friend is replaced with ‘likes’ on a post.”

– Holly Shakya

ACTIVITIES

Sharing Circle

Analyzing a Real-Life Technology Scenario

An Opportunity to Teach

With these activities, participants will consider kindness in the context of online communication. What are the challenges to practicing kindness in the online environment? How would your experience of technology change if you prioritized kindness?

ACTIVITY ONE: SHARING CIRCLE

For this activity, you will engage in a group discussion about your tech use. The questions are designed to help participants consider how they might change some of their habits to feel better and embrace healthier relationships with technology.

STEP ONE

Opening quote

“Good etiquette serves relationships, and technology can too, as long as we use it well.”

– Emily Post Institute

STEP TWO

Mindful moment

“Two feet, one breath.”

Close your eyes or take a soft gaze toward the ground in front of you. Bring your attention to the feeling of your two feet and the ground firmly underneath it. Sit up straight and take in one slow, deep breath, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through your mouth.

STEP THREE

Guidelines for conversation

- Respect the talking piece.
- Listen to understand rather than to respond.
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- What is said in the circle stays in the circle.
- Passing is always an option, but we strongly encourage you to share as much as you are comfortable.

STEP FOUR

Questions/Rounds

1. **Weather Report.** Use weather terms to describe your mood in this moment related to technology use today. For example: *Partly sunny: I had to ask students to stop using social media apps several times today, or, Sunny: I watched a highly-successful interactive media presentation delivered by a student.*
 2. **Provide an example of a time when your technology use at home or at school led to an argument with your parents or a teacher because it did not match their expectations. Describe the nature of the disagreement and how you have or have not resolved it. If the argument is ongoing, how might you and your parents or teachers resolve it?**
 3. **Talk about a time when you said something on technology that you knew you would never say in person. How did it make you feel initially? Later? Did anything specific happen as a result of your comment? Explain.**
 4. **Share an experience where another person posted without your permission, ghosted you, or said something hurtful about you using technology. How did that make you feel? What, if any, steps did you take to remedy the situation? Might you handle the situation differently now? Explain.**
 5. **Do you set any parameters around your own use of technology? For example, do you limit your screen time, turn off notifications, or turn off your phone at certain times of day? (Note to facilitator: This concept can be introduced as a form of self-kindness.)**
-

STEP FIVE

Closing quote

“Communication goes fast, travels far, and is sticky.”

– Dr. Michael Rich, MD, director Digital Wellness Lab, Boston Children’s Hospital

ACTIVITY TWO: ANALYZING A REAL-LIFE TECHNOLOGY SCENARIO

Here, the group will read different accounts of the same event, an incident in a Burlington, Vermont restaurant in July, 2022 that went viral.

- From Seven Days: [A Single Pebble Owner Apologizes After Video Goes Viral](#)
 - From VTDigger: [A restaurant, a service dog and a viral controversy in Vermont](#)
 - From Reddit: [A Single Pebble owner refuses to serve customer with a service dog; Apology Statement from A Single Pebble](#)
-

QUOTE

Then, consider the following quotations from Emma McCadden of A Single Pebble:



“There’s two pieces of it. There’s what happened. And then there’s the way that the internet made this into a crazy thing overnight, before I had any control over stopping it.”

“Social media is a very fast-paced and very lawless place.”

QUESTION

Using these quotes from the VTDigger story as a starting point, analyze this viral incident for kindness/unkindness in social media use by responding to the following questions:

1. Whose viewpoint do you empathize/sympathize with the most, the restaurant owner’s or the dog owner’s? Why?
2. Discuss evidence of both unkindness and kindness in this situation and its outcome.
3. How did the “lawlessness” of social media harm both people involved (and potentially some of the 1 million spectators)?
4. What other ways could this situation have been settled that could have potentially lessened the hurt to both parties?
5. Have you ever made a post in anger and frustration and then wished that you could take it back? Discuss your experience and the implications of posting when you are in an emotionally charged state.

ACTIVITY THREE: **AN OPPORTUNITY TO TEACH**

For this activity, use the following prompt in a group discussion or expand it to creating activities, stories, or games to be shared with elementary students.

QUESTION

What techniques, examples, or stories would you use to teach those who are younger than you about *why* and *how* to be kind online?

ACTIVITY FOUR: **IS THE INTERNET MAKING YOU MEANER?**

[Common Sense Media has designed this helpful interactive activity](#) to explore online disinhibition and cyberbullying and help participants answer the following question:

Is the internet making you meaner?

ACTIVITY FIVE: WHAT WOULD EMILY POST SAY?

For this activity, participants will consider **advice on texting** offered by the Emily Post Institute. Emily Post (1872-1960) was a writer and cultural influencer, a traveling correspondent during WWI, and author of the bestselling book, *Etiquette: In Business, In Society, In Politics, and at Home*, written in 1922. Her institute remains a foremost resource on etiquette and maintains a primary office in Waterbury, Vermont. Once your group has reviewed the guidelines below, break into pods or triads to answer the following questions:

Select five etiquette suggestions from the list that feel the most important and relevant to you, and rank them in order of importance. Share your thoughts in the group. Make note of commonalities and differences.

Are there any etiquette suggestions with which you disagree? Explain.

Are there any etiquette suggestions that you would add to the list? Explain.

“Good manners reflect something from inside – an innate sense of consideration for others and respect for self.”

– Emily Post

Emily Post’s Texting Manners

1. Don’t text to inform someone of sad news or to end a relationship. Deliver the news in person or by phone.
2. Keep your message brief. If it runs on and on, make a phone call instead.
3. Be careful when choosing a recipient from your phone book; a slip of the finger could send the text to the wrong recipient.
4. When you text someone who doesn’t have your number, start by stating who you are. “Hi, it’s Kate (from yoga).”
5. Respond to a text by texting back or with a phone call.
6. If you receive a text by mistake, respond to the sender with “Sorry, wrong number.”
7. Don’t text at the movies, a play, or a concert—the screen light is annoying to others.
8. Don’t text anything confidential, private, or potentially embarrassing.
9. Don’t be upset if your text doesn’t get an immediate response—you can’t know for sure when the recipient will read the message.
10. Think of texting as a conversation: If you would respond in the conversation, then respond in the text. A short “TNX” to acknowledge that the message was received is a simple way to end the conversation.
11. Just as you shouldn’t answer your phone during a conversation, you shouldn’t text when you’re engaged with someone else. If you are with someone who won’t stop texting during your conversation, feel free to excuse yourself until they have concluded their messaging.
12. Don’t text and drive.

HEALTHY TECHNOLOGY USE

A healthy relationship with technology allows you to keep your physical, mental, and emotional well-being in balance, when you are on and off your devices.

A **healthy** relationship with technology allows you to maintain important relationships, get the right amount of sleep each night, attend to school and other responsibilities, and manage your technology-related stress or anxiety.

There are a number of common consequences to unhealthy technology use, which can be particularly negative for teens:

- **Technology can disrupt relationships.** Too much time on tech can keep you from focusing on school, completing household chores, or tending properly to relationships, leading to conflict with teachers, parents, siblings, and friends.
- **Technology can disrupt sleep habits.** Research shows that 73% of high school students are not getting enough sleep, which can affect everything from mood and brain function to physical growth. ([Healthline](#), 2019)
- **Technology can contribute to social anxiety.** People often use social media as a tool to “market” themselves to friends and followers. Constantly curating yourself on social media, and sometimes presenting yourself in ways that are not true to who you are, can have a negative impact on your self-esteem.

To avoid these pitfalls and find a healthier balance in your technology use, it may help to:

- Do a self-assessment of how you feel when using technology. What devices, apps, or content make you feel bad, which make you feel good, and why?
- Consider taking breaks from technology during certain times of the day and creating dedicated times to mindfully focus on chores, homework, and connecting with loved-ones. Consider why you might be using technology to avoid these responsibilities. Is there something that needs to be addressed?
- Experiment with deleting apps and unfollowing content that make you feel bad or that waste time you’d prefer to spend on other things.

“Simply put, humans are not wired to be constantly wired.”

– Cal Newport

ACTIVITIES

Sharing Circle

Self-Assessment of Apps

Having Difficult
Conversations IRL
(In Real Life)

A healthier relationship with technology might ask you to change some of your habits, establish different limits for when and how you use your devices, and recognize where you need better skills and supports to address problems. The following four activities ask participants to contemplate how their use of technology might affect their health and wellbeing.

ACTIVITY ONE: SHARING CIRCLE

For this activity, you will engage in a group discussion about your tech use. The questions are designed to help participants consider how they might change some of their habits to feel better and embrace healthier relationships with technology.

STEP ONE

Opening quote

A healthy outside starts from the inside.

– Robert Urich

STEP TWO

Mindful moment

“Two feet, one breath.”

Close your eyes or take a soft gaze toward the ground in front of you. Bring your attention to the feeling of your two feet and the ground firmly underneath it. Sit up straight and take in one slow, deep breath, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through your mouth.

STEP THREE

Guidelines for conversation

- Respect the talking piece.
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- Speak from the heart.
- What is said in the circle stays in the circle.
- Passing is always an option, but we strongly encourage you to share as much as you are comfortable.

STEP FOUR

Questions/Rounds

1. **What is something you do with technology that makes you happy?**
 2. **How do you use technology to support and connect with others in positive ways?**
 3. **What boundaries and privacy controls have you set up for yourself in your online life?**
 4. **How do you feel after a technology “binge” or after getting lost scrolling or gaming?**
-

STEP FIVE

Closing quote

“The more you understand yourself, the more silence there is, the healthier you are.”

– Maxime Lagacé

Additional questions if you have extra time:

When you take breaks from technology, what is the effect on you and/or different aspects of your life? (Consider your physical, social, and academic needs in your answer.)

Talk about a time when you practiced courage and vulnerability by having a difficult or sensitive conversation in person. What are the benefits of having this type of conversation in person?

How much sleep are you getting? How does your device impact your sleep?

In what ways have your relationships with your parents, teachers, and/or friends changed due to your tech use?

How do you use social media and how does it affect your feelings about yourself?

What parts of social media bring up negative feelings for you?

ACTIVITY TWO: SELF-ASSESSMENT OF APPS

For this activity participants will self-assess their most used apps and answer questions related to the amount of time they spend on those apps, their feelings while using them, how their app-use affects their connections with others, and possible changes in behavior.

Self-Assessment Directions:

- 1 Go into Screen Time on your phone and press See All Activity under the graph.
- 2 Switch to the Week tab at the top of your screen.
- 3 Write down the top three categories of use:

1

2

3

- 4 Write down the six apps you used most and for how long you used them over the course of the week:

1

2

3

4

5

6

ACTIVITY TWO: SELF-ASSESSMENT OF APPS Continued


- 5 Scroll back and take a look at the previous two weeks.
- 6 Write down the top categories of use and most used apps for each of the two weeks:

| Last week: | Two weeks ago: |
|------------|----------------|
| 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 2 |
| 3 | 3 |

| Last week: | Two weeks ago: |
|------------|----------------|
| 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 2 |
| 3 | 3 |
| 4 | 4 |
| 5 | 5 |
| 6 | 6 |

- 7 What patterns do you notice? How much time are you spending on apps overall? Does this reveal anything surprising or is this information what you would expect? Explain.
- 8 Thinking only about the most used apps (top 5-7 apps), fill out the following scale.

| List of most used apps | Am I spending more time than I would like on this app? | How do I feel when I am using this app? (good/bad, adequate/inadequate, happy/sad) | Does this app connect me with others in a positive, negative, or neutral way? | Would a change in how I use or interact with this app benefit my health? How? |
|------------------------|--|--|---|---|
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 **Strategies for limiting time on an app:** If you identify an app you would like to use less, you can use the following tools to help:

1 Put a limit on the amount of time you can use the app each day.

2 Move the apps you want to limit into a folder so they are not as present on your screen.

ACTIVITY THREE:

HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IRL (IN REAL LIFE)

In small groups, participants will compare the experience of having difficult conversations in-person versus online.

QUESTIONS

What are the differences between:

- **breaking up with someone in person versus online?**
- **leaving someone out in person versus online?**
- **making a hurtful comment in person versus online?**
- **“blocking” someone virtually versus in real life?**

Where is there potential for misinterpretation in each scenario? How might it make someone feel to get a text in each scenario? Why does it make sense to have a face-to-face conversation in some situations?

ACTIVITY FOUR: CURATING SELF ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Common Sense Media has designed this helpful lesson to explore how people curate their self-images on social media. Follow the lesson as outlined, and add the following reflection question:

Which of the responses by teens show healthy relationships with social media, and which show unhealthy relationships?

In Conclusion

DIGITAL WELLNESS IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

The potential harms of technology use by young people is a cause of grave concern among parents and educators. With the resources offered here, we intend to propose positive approaches to technology and resources and activities that can empower kids and adults alike to mindfully develop healthier tech habits.

This resource was developed over a year of research and collaboration among the authors, beginning with a week-long intensive work session during the summer of 2022. That August we presented our early thoughts and “filters” strategy to a handful of Vermont educators and shared some of these activities with them to use in their classrooms. Our activities have now been field-tested with students, and although teens are sometimes resistant to the information shared here, we have found that these activities do lead to important conversations about technology use. We hope you find this resource useful.

We also recognize that this topic is huge, dynamic, and changing all the time. While it is clear that our reliance on and relationships with technology can have severe unintended consequences when not kept in check, the research and resources to help mitigate these effects are evolving everyday. There are many people and organizations dedicating themselves to this important work. We have found the following resources helpful and invite you to turn to them for the latest information on the topic of digital wellness.

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ORGANIZATIONS LEADING THE WAY

The Center for Humane Technology
<https://www.humanetech.com/>

Common Sense Media & Common Sense Education
<https://www.common Sense Media.org/>

The Digital Wellness Lab
<https://digitalwellnesslab.org/>

Mindful Schools
<https://www.mindfulschools.org/>

The Social Institute
<https://thesocialinstitute.com/solutions/>

Digital Wellness

Building a Healthy Relationship
with Technology